

## New Brunswick

**Closing the gap**

*Women from New Brunswick are concerned about equity in terms of women receiving equal pay for work of equal value, and equity in terms of access to the fisheries resource*

by **Docile Cormier, Kouchibouguac**

*Docile Cormier is a secretary in a school board. Though not directly involved in the fishery, she was born, raised and still lives in a fishing community where she is very active. She is a union activist and has been helping women from her area organize within the 'Comité des femmes côtières du Nouveau-Brunswick', a group devoted to bringing women from coastal communities together and giving them a voice. This write-up is based on a statement presented at the Newfoundland workshop.*

Women are working together in order to achieve pay equity. We want to close the gap that exists between the wages of women and men, for the same work. The major reason for this gap is that, historically, work done by women has been undervalued and underpaid, in relation to work done by men.

Pay inequity is a widespread problem, but it is even more crucial for women in the fisheries sector in New Brunswick who work under difficult conditions and are paid very low wages. In fish-plants, men are paid an average of Can\$2 an hour more than women doing comparable work. Very few fish-plants in New Brunswick are unionized and the seasonal nature of the fishery gives very little bargaining power to the workers. Production is very concentrated and requires women to work long hours but for short periods of time

This is why the *Comité des femmes côtières du Nouveau-Brunswick* has joined a coalition of women organizing for the Women's World March 2000 which is dedicated to pay equity. In October 2000, before joining other women from the world in New York, the women from New Brunswick will meet their provincial premier to request a Pay Equity Act.

Women are also demanding equity of access to the resource for the inshore fishers. We all know that fishermen have high payments to assume: boats, fishing gear and now they have additional costs with mandatory



dockside monitoring, observer fees, costs for harbour authorities, and so on. All these extra costs come at a time when the fishing industry is least able to absorb them. This puts a great deal of additional stress on the fishers and also their wives and children.

In our communities, there is a widespread feeling that fairer sharing of access to fisheries resources would enable more fishermen and their families to survive. For instance, we want, and should have, quotas for snow crab in inshore waters.

In New Brunswick, the lucrative snow crab is fished by a relatively small mid-shore fleet of approximately 100 vessels which are engaged in a partnership agreement with the DFO. This fleet contributes to the costs of research and monitoring and, in exchange, has been given exclusive access to the snow crab resource. For years now, the inshore fishers, through their organization, the MFU, have been asking for fair access to snow crab in inshore waters. This would allow them to develop a sustainable multi-species fishery. The snow crab would help our communities, as the fishermen would bring in more money, and other members of their families would work in the fish-plants to prepare the crab meat.